

THE BELL HOTEL.



The Bell Hotel in 1905.

The Bell had several names before it's present use as apartments, The Bell Commercial Hotel, The Cromwell Inn and The Vintage Hotel being the most recent. In 1905 Mr. W J Rolph was 'catering for families.'

There must have been two 'Bells'. The earliest building that we know about belonged to a Mr. Harding and was sometimes referred to as 'Mr Harding's Cottage' and it was first known as 'The Bell' in the mid 1760's. The first meeting of the Lakenheath and Bandon Fen Commissioners was held there about 1768 and it's thought that the medieval Courts Baron and Leet continued to meet at the Bell well into the 18th century when boundaries could be confirmed and disputes settled. (Or not)!

The present building is early 19th century and is of special architectural interest. Before the development of mews type houses at the rear there were stables and a coach house. Significant archaeological finds have been discovered nearby. *In 1851 there were 1,864 inhabitants in the village.

*heritage.suffolk.gov.uk

In 1791, a boy, Thomas Harper, was arrested at The Bell accused of the murder of farmer Thomas Briggs. This crime remained a topic of local interest for a very considerable time.

[Click here to read the story of the Undley murder.](#)

On at least one occasion (30th June 1863) The Bell was the venue of an inquest; that into the death of an eight-year-old boy who died as a result of an accident at the Lakenheath Fair. The verdict was 'Accidental Death'. No doubt other inquests took place here.

Business Matters.

The Bell was the location of much of the commercial life of the village. Regular auctions and sales of property were held here. General agricultural and property sales began about 1782 in the first Bell and continued in the new Bell until the late 19th century at least.

To be SOLD by AUCTION,
At the BELL INN, in LAKENHEATH, Suffolk,
On THURSDAY, April 1, 1802,
ALL the ESTATES, &c. of the late
CHARLES ROPER, deceased; consisting of
several good Dwelling-Houses and Cottages, situate
in the parish of LAKENHEATH; also 16 Acres of Fen
Land, in two Pièces; the Particulars of which will be
distributed in due time.

To be SOLD by AUCTION,
By NOAH BAKER and SON,
On MONDAY next, June 6th, 1803, at the BELL INN,
LAKENHEATH, Suffolk,
ALL the Out-door Stock, Household
Furniture, Stock in Trade, and other Effects,
of a Person who has made an Assignment thereof for
the equal Benefit of his Creditors, (removed to the
above Inn for Convenience of Sale); consisting of 3
excellent poll'd cows in full profit, a horned ditto and
calf, 2 very useful cart mares and a hobby, a young
sow with pig, and 4 lambs; neat 4-post bedstead with
crimson morine furniture, full-sized featherbed and
bedding, sheets and table linen, tables and chairs,
chest of drawers, and an alarum; small copper and
irons, barrel churn, &c.—And the Stock in Trade
consists of good baizes, Russia duck, cotton checks,
hemp, dowlas, and Irish cloths, printed cottons, white
calicoes, muslins, lawns, &c. in good condition; cotton
and linen handkerchiefs, worsted hose, some new and
second-hand wearing apparel; shop fixtures, scales,
weights, &c. in small lots.
Sale to begin precisely at Ten o'clock, and continue
till all are sold, by a Written Catalogue, to be seen at
the place of sale; and at the Auctioneers', Thetford.

To be SOLD by AUCTION,
By GEORGE YOUNG,
At the BELL INN, at LAKENHEATH, in Suffolk, on
MONDAY the 19th of July, 1807, at Four in the
Afternoon, a valuable ESTATE in LAKENHEATH
aforesaid, in the following Lots,
Lot I. **A**LL that Copyhold Messuage, or
Tenement, with the stable, outhouses,
yards, and gardens adjoining, now in the occupations
of John Hardy, Charles Morley, and others, at the
yearly rents of 9l. 19s. 6d.
Lot II. All that Freehold Piece of excellent Marsh
or Hay Ground, in the Callidge, containing by esti-
mation 4 Acres (more or less) now in the occupation
of Robert Gathercole.
Lot III. All that Copyhold Piece of exceeding good
Marsh or Hay Ground adjoining the second Lot,
containing by estimation 4 Acres (more or less) now
in the occupation of John Hardy.
Lot IV. All that Copyhold Piece of good Marsh
Ground, in the Craggs, containing by estimation 4
Acres (more or less) now in the occupation of Thos.
Payne.—Further particulars may be had of Mr.
Fuller, Attorney, at Brandon.

LAKENHEATH and MILDENHALL.

TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,
By Mr. CULLEY,
At the Bell Inn, Lakenheath, on Monday, November
23, 1813, at One o'clock in the Afternoon,
TWO FARM HOUSES, and about
157 acres of good arable, excellent pasture,
meadow, and fen Land, in Lakenheath, divided into
22 lots.
And at the Bell Inn, Mildenhall, on Tuesday, No-
vember 23, at the like hour, about 150 acres of excel-
lent pasture and fen Land, lying in Mildenhall, di-
vided into six lots.
Printed particulars may be had at the places of
sale; of Messrs. Isaacson, Solicitors, Mildenhall; or
of Messrs. Steward and Skipper, Solicitors, Nor-
wich.

Newspaper research by Michael Tuffs

In 1844 some farmers and corn buyers were meeting regularly at The Bell. As well as national politics and the state of the country generally, matters affecting farming and its profitability would certainly have been high on their agenda. Amongst these would have been an opportunity to discuss wages of local labourers. They had a lot to talk about quite apart from local gossip and the weather. At various times they might have been talking and arguing about the state of the country and how it affected their livelihoods:-

1815/16.

In most parts of the country itinerant soldiers returning from the Napoleonic Wars were competing for work with local labourers, often driving down wages. There had been a very poor harvest in Suffolk so fewer labourers were needed and farmers' profits were reduced. The price of bread increased threatening near starvation for many families. Cereals were imported and this further reduced farmers' profits.

The Corn Laws. To protect farmers profits the government set a Corn Duty (Tax) on cereal imports, (mainly coming from America), with the intention of keeping the price of cereals high. This further increased bread prices and hunger seriously threatened a large section of the population, not just farm labourers. Widespread protests led to the Corn Riots with local riots in Littleport, Brandon, Feltwell and Hockwold. There was great opposition to these laws and they were eventually repealed in 1846. Growing cereals made economic sense for farmers.

In Lakenheath two results from the legislation were greater prosperity for tenant farmers and landowners who were now the major employers in the village, and harsher times for farm labourers and others in the village who fell on hard times.

1830-1850.

'The Captain Swing' riots. Mechanisation threatens labourers' livelihoods.

Another poor harvest followed by a harsh winter caused a lowering of labourers' wages. So far as farm labourers were concerned this situation had been made far worse by the speedy adoption of threshing machines which reduced the number of labourers needed after the harvest. Protests rapidly became violent with 'machine breaking' and the burning of barns and ricks in East Anglia. These disturbances became known as the 'Captain Swing Riots' after threatening letters to landowners signed by 'Captain Swing'. *Between 1843 and 1845 250 fires were set in Norfolk and Suffolk. Emigration began to be an option both within the UK and abroad.

**The East Anglian Agrarian Riots of 1822. Paul Musket. bahs.org.uk*

1850's - 1870's. Conditions of work.

¹Conditions remained more or less as in previous decades for those who continued to work on the land although specialist workers such as horsemen or cowmen and skilled gamekeepers were sought after by the gentry and could find more regular employment. Demands for improvement in agricultural labourers' wages grew and workers' unions began to be formed.

The Crimean War (1853- 1856) led to sharp price increases in produce but farm workers' pay did not keep pace with the farmers increased profits. Cereals were now less profitable and the earlier switch to cereal growing during the Corn Laws period reverted to cattle farming.

Development of large infrastructure projects such as the Cambridge to Brandon railway and canals and dock building offered alternative employment and it was not uncommon for agricultural workers to leave the countryside. By the 1870's wages and rents were an almost constant issue. Although there were increases in wages rents also increased. In 1874 workers in Exning and Newmarket demanded a wage of 13/- per week which was rejected and many labourers were 'locked out' by farmers.

'Life as a Farm Worker in Nineteenth Century Suffolk. Andy Kerridge 2022

1853. It wasn't all business!

In 1853 one of the most celebrated bare-knuckle fights in boxing history took place in Lakenheath between two famous fighters, Nat Langham from Hinkley in Leicestershire and Tom Sayers from Camden Town, London. The prospects for the fight and the result must have been thoroughly discussed at the Bell especially since betting on the outcome is likely to have been popular. No doubt the racing at Newmarket was also followed keenly.

Landlords of The Bell. 1778-1937.

1778. John Harding 'at The Bell'. Possibly the son of Robert Harding of Mr Harding's Cottage, later the first Bell Inn.

1832. Mr. Fincham, 'of The Bell'.

1844. William Fincham.

1855. William Fincham

1861. William Fincham. Licenced as a lodging house.

1865. ditto. Licenced as a Commercial Hotel. Fincham is also a farmer.

1869. ditto

1871. Mr Fincham marries

1874. Mr. Fincham

1881. Rebecca Neave. Granddaughter of Fincham. She may have emigrated to America.

1886. William Fincham.

1888. Rebecca Fincham

1891-1912. Walter John Rolph (Victualler & threshing machine proprietor, farmer).

1916-1937. Henry George Allsop. (Commercial Hotel & Posting House).

From 'Suffolk Pubs'. Campaign for Real Ale. Suffolk. Camra.org.

For over 150 years from 1832 to the beginning of WWII three families appear to have been landlords of The Bell and this was often in addition to other income from a range of agricultural activities. The exact date of the present building is not yet known but it probably dates from the tenure of William Fincham. There may of course have been two William Finchams.

More adverts which show how important The Bell was in the life of the village.

INQUEST.—On Tuesday, an inquest was held before H. Wayman, Esq., at the Bell, Lakenheath, on Jas. Hardy. The deceased, in company with another boy, was getting sand out of a pit, and while they were cutting the sand from the sides, the top of the pit caved in and buried them up. The boy, whose name was Butler, was fortunately rescued by a man ploughing in a field near. After ten minutes' labour, the deceased was also got out, but was quite dead. He was about 13 years old. Verdict, Accidental Death.

LAKENHEATH CHARITY SCHOOL.
WANTED.
A SCHOOLMASTER. He must be qualified to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic. There is a public Schoolroom. The Stipend now is £42 per Annum, arising from land at Soham.
 There is another School in the Parish with a small Stipend. The late Master had both, and it is very probable they might be held together again.
 Applications with Testimonials of Qualification and Character to be sent, post-paid, directed to the Trustees of Goward's Charity, at the Bell Inn, Lakenheath, on or before Tuesday, the 16th day of January next, at Eleven o'clock in the Forenoon, and the Election will take place at Two o'clock the same day.
 No Candidate will be elected who does not attend personally on that day.
 By order,
WM. CLARKE,
 Solicitor to the Trustees.
Thetford, December 26, 1843.

TITHE COMMISSION.—NOTICE.
I, WILLIAM WESTERMAN CAWSTON, of Worlington, Suffolk, do hereby Give Notice, that the Map and Draft Apportionment of the Rentcharge in lieu of the Tithes of a District comprising all the Fen Lands in the Parish of LAKENHEATH, Suffolk, with a Bill of Costs, has been deposited at the House of William Fincham, known as the Bell Inn, in Lakenheath, for the inspection of all Persons interested in the Lands or Tithes of the said District. And I further Give Notice, that a Meeting will be holden for the purpose of hearing objections to the Draft Apportionment by any Persons interested as aforesaid; and that such Meeting will be holden at the House of William Fincham, known as the Bell Inn, at Lakenheath, on FRIDAY, the First day of September, 1854, at Twelve o'clock at Noon.
WILLIAM WESTERMAN CAWSTON,
 Apportioner and Surveyor.
Worlington, August 10th, 1854.

LAKENHEATH.
THE UNDLEY HALL ESTATE.—This estate, containing 950a. Or. 10p., divided into four lots, was sold at the Angel Hotel, on Wednesday last, by Messrs. Newson and Sexton, and fetched the following prices:—Lot 1. "Place's Farm," Mr. Gittus, 7000l. Lot 2. "The Undley Hall Farm," 18,000l., Mr. Wainwright, Troston. Lot 3. "Stubbin's Farm," 4350l., Mr. Winkfield, Shipdham. Lot 4. 3a. Or. 5p. of land, 80l., Mr. Read.
FATAL ACCIDENT TO A CHILD.—Yesterday (Monday) an inquest was held at the Bell Inn, Lakenheath, before G. A. Partridge, Esq., on the body of Joseph Cooper, aged 8 years, the child of Joseph Cooper, a waterman, and Edith his wife. It appeared that on the previous Saturday a man named Charles Roland, who had attended Lakenheath fair with his swinging-boats, was taking his things down, when the deceased, unnoticed by Roland, got hold of a rope attached to one of the poles, and pulled it so that one of them fell upon him, and injured him so severely that he died about six the same evening.—Verdict, "Accidental death."

THE ESTATES
Of the late JOHN CALDECOTT, Esquire, deceased.
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,
 At the Bell Inn, Lakenheath,
 By Messrs. ISAACSON,
 On Saturday the 26th day of July next, at Twelve o'clock for One precisely,
ALL that elegant and commodious MANSION, in the town of Lakenheath, comprising handsome entrance hall, dining and drawing rooms, conservatory, numerous sleeping apartments, and domestic offices; Coach-house and Stables, with every other convenience for the residence of a family of the first respectability.—There are extensive Gardens and Pleasure Grounds, ornamented by the finest Timber and Shrubberies, containing with the Meadow surrounding about 16 Acres, the whole being now in the occupation of Thomas Waddelow, Esquire, who will quit at Michaelmas next.
 Also in divers Lots, for the convenience of purchasers, a capital FARM-HOUSE and FARMING BUILDINGS, and nearly EIGHTY ACRES of open Field Land, and TWO HUNDRED and THIRTY ACRES of Pasture and Fen, lying dispersedly in the parish of Lakenheath.
 Part of the Purchase Monies will, if required, be allowed to remain on Mortgage.
 Full particulars describing each Lot will be delivered Fourteen Days prior to the Sale.—For further particulars in the meantime apply to Messrs. Isaacsons and Son, Solicitors, Mildenhall and Newmarket, and to the Auctioneers.